> often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or I am tolerated if I am silent and inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply (p. 231).

Beam articulated one of the primary issues Black gay men are faced with when our relationships with our families and communities are examined. We cannot afford to be disconnected from these institutions, yet it would seem that we are willing to create and accept dysfunctional roles in them, roles of caricature, silence, and illusion. In truth, we are often forced into these roles to survive. This critical dilemma causes some of us to engage in dishonest relationships with our kin. It can foster apathy between us and the communities of home that we need and that need our presence. The contradictions of "home" are amplified and become more complex when Black gay men's relationships with the white gay community are also examined.

The post-Stonewall white gay community of the 1980s was not seriously concerned with the existence of Black gay men except as sexual objects. In media and art the Black male was given little representation except as a big, Black dick. This aspect of the white gay sensibility is strikingly revealed in the photographs of Black males by the late Robert Mapplethorpe. Though his images may be technically and esthetically well-composed, his work *artistically* perpetuates racial stereotypes constructed around sexuality and desire. In many of his images, Black males are only shown as parts of the anatomy—genitals, chests, buttocks—close up and close cropped to elicit desire. Mapplethorpe's eye pays special attention to the penis at the expense of showing us the subject's face, and thus, a whole person. The penis becomes *the* identity of the Black male, which is the classic racist stereotype recreated and presented as Art in the context of a gay vision.

Mapplethorpe's "Man in a Polyester Suit," for example, presents a Black man without a head, wearing a business suit, his trousers unzipped, and his fat, long penis dangling down, a penis that is not erect. It can be assumed that many viewers who appreciate Mapplethorpe's work, and who construct sexual fantasies from it, probably wondered *first* how much larger would the penis become during erection, as opposed to wondering *who* is the man in the photo or *why* is his head missing? What is insulting and endangering to Black men is Mapplethorpe's *conscious* determination that the faces, the heads, and by extension, the minds and experiences of some of his Black subjects are not as important as close-up shots of their cocks.

It is virtually impossible while viewing Mapplethorpe's photos of Black males to avoid confronting issues of exploitation and objectification. Additionally, Black gay men are not immune to the desire elicited by his photos. We, too, are drawn to the inherent eroticism. In "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality" (*Ten-8*, No. 22, 1986), Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer accurately identify this dichotomy when they observe that Mapplethorpe's images of Black males reiterate "the terms of colonial fantasy" and "service the expectations of white desire." They then ask the most critical question of all: "What do [Mapplethorpe's images] say to our wants and desires as Black gay men (p. 6)?"

It has not fully dawned on white gay men that racist conditioning has rendered many of them no different from their heterosexual brothers in the eyes of Black gays and lesbians. Coming out of the closet to confront sexual oppression has not necessarily given white males the motivation or insight to transcend their racist conditioning. This failure (or reluctance) to transcend is costing the gay and lesbian community the opportunity to become a powerful force for creating *real* social changes that reach beyond issues of sexuality. It has fostered much of the distrust that permeates the relations between the Black and white commu-